

THE SUNDAY TIMES SECTION 8 | JANUARY 18, 2009

travel

WHAT'S HOT
2009

This year's coolest islands, resorts, hotels, bars and beaches – and yes, you can afford them all P20

I'M
IF YOU

Can you handle the most activity holiday of the winter?

HERE COME
SUPERJUMBO

The total package from the A3





WHAT'S HOT 2009

New. Stylish. Cutting-edge. Not necessarily expensive.
In a swanky year in travel with Susan d'Arcy's 50 hot tips

MAKING WAVES ON THE SOUTH COAST

This Easter, **Bournemouth** pledges it will become our coolest stretch of coast, when it unveils "the best beach huts in the world". Designed by Wayne and Geraldine Hemingway, founders of the fashion brand Red or Dead, the 59 individually styled retro sheds, aka surf pods (0845 055 0968, bournemouth.co.uk; price to be decided), have kitsch murals, mains electricity and hot and cold running water. There's even a penthouse version. They overlook Boscombe's award-winning beaches.

The area's other big claim to fame will be Europe's first artificial surf reef. The £2.7m project is set to open in September and promises grade-five breakers (when the swell's strong) for would-be Kelly Slaters.

There's a new wave of chic places to stay in and around Bournemouth, from the breezy Urban Beach Hotel

(01202 301509, urbanbeachhotel.co.uk; from £95) to the sophisticated Hotel du Vin (01202 785570, hotelduvin.com; from £170) in nearby **Poole**. And there's also a liberal sprinkling of celebrity chefs, including Gary Rhodes at Rhodes South (01202 483434, rhodes-south.co.uk) in **Christchurch**, where three delicious courses are about £20 cheaper than in his London restaurants — and the views are infinitely better.

Mark Hix, the former Le Caprice chef and a critics' favourite, has an Oyster & Fish House (01297 446910, hixoysterandfishhouse.co.uk; set menu £21 for three courses) a seagull's flap from the Cobb in **Lyme Regis**.

CITY SLICKERS

Edinburgh will welcome this country's first example of "hautel couture" when Hotel Missoni (hotelmissoni.com) opens in spring, bringing the Italian fashion label's

trademark multicoloured stripes to the board-and-lodging business.

Leeds is further enhancing its reputation as a foodie destination, with local boy Marco Pierre White and Jamie Oliver stepping up to the plate alongside Michelin-star winners Raymond Blanc, Albert Roux and Vineet Bhatia, who have all opened restaurants there recently. For the perfect postprandial perch, the UK's original boutique hotel, 42 The Calls (0113 244 0099, theetoncollection.com; £130), is having a much-needed spruce-up, which will be unveiled later this year.

Meanwhile, **Birmingham** has just gained its first AA-five-star accommodation. The honour went not to a hotel, but to Staying Cool (0161 832 4060, stayingcool.com; from £110), serviced flats kitted out with bespoke designer pieces.

Staying Cool, which also has flats in Manchester and Devon, is probably

the UK's hippest self-catering outfit, but others are taking up the challenge. In **Brighton**, Unique Home Stays (01637 881942, uniquehomestays.com) has some stunning properties, including the Den, a contemporary pad in Brighton's old town, which sleeps six for £725 for a week — try getting a hotel room as stylish for that sort of money.

This year's most well-connected renter, however, will be the Prince of Wales. He is offering two sustainably built barn conversions in **Carmarthenshire**, one sleeping four, the other six. Dogs are welcome. With Premier Cottages (01579 346473, premiercottages.co.uk), a week starts at £137pp.

THE INN CROWD

A new breed of boutique pubs is revolutionising the traditional weekend away, bringing upmarket

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design values to the cosy informality of the village pub.

Forerunners include the Kingham Plough (01608 658327, thekinghamplough.co.uk; £85), in the Cotswolds, which is run by Heston Blumenthal's former sous chef, and the Gurnard's Head (01736 796928, gurnardshead.co.uk; £72), on a pristine cove near Zennor, in Cornwall.

Notable newcomers include the Crown, in Amersham (01494 721541, dhillonhotels.co.uk; £109). It already had plenty going for it — Elizabethan beams, inglenook fires and the cachet of starring alongside Hugh Grant's fringe in *Four Weddings* — but now Ilse Crawford, whose portfolio includes Babington House, has updated it with Roberts radios and rocking chairs.

Likewise, the new Crazy Bear (01494 673086, crazybeargroup.co.uk; £215), in Beaconsfield, is offering the same perks as the poshest country-house hotels — right down to freestanding copper baths at the end of your bed.

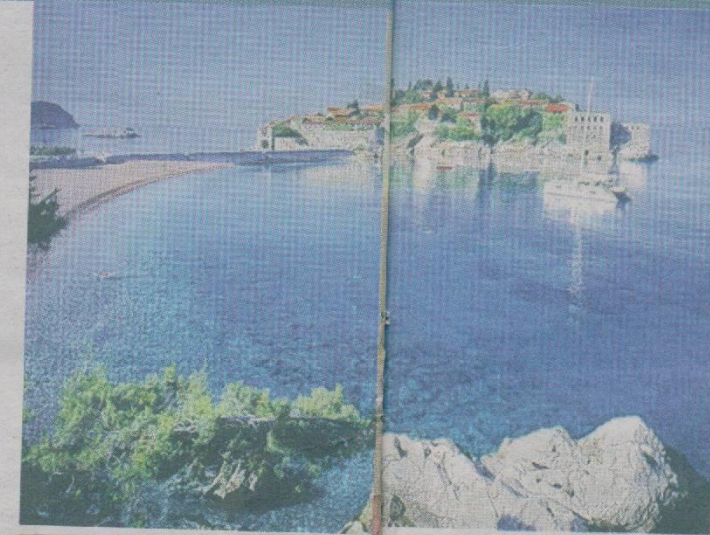
LONDON CALLING

A hop south of Covent Garden, the Savoy (0845 071 0153, fairmont.com; £350) is undergoing the most expensive restoration in British hotel history. After an 18-month, £100m refit (with design dazzle supplied by Pierre-Yves Rochon, the brains behind the George V, in Paris), it will emerge in the summer to give Claridge's and the Dorchester a run for their money.

Out east, Terence Conran's latest project, the Boundary (020 7729 1051, theboundary.co.uk; £200), is a converted warehouse in artsy Shoreditch, with 17 rooms devoted to particular styles such as Bauhaus and Le Corbusier. It even has its own artist in residence, Javaid Alvi.

Von Essen Hotels, owner of national treasures such as Cliveden, reveals Verta (01761 301001, vonessenhotels.com; £255), on the banks of the Thames at Battersea, in September. It will offer prime people-watching from the bar, which overlooks the London heliport, the Rich List's version of a taxi rank.

Another one to watch is the Dean Street Town House (sohohouse.com; rates unavailable), where B&B stands for bed and brasserie, promising a good-value option in the centre of Soho. It should open by the summer.



could offer customers meals at realistic prices? Doubles start at just £70 a night — that's a bottle of Evian from some design-hotel minibars. Better still, it's the first of a planned chain of seven.

Right now, the Chateau d'Arnac, in Dordogne, offers a good-value romantic interlude beyond the capital. The riverside castle has huge ornate rooms, furnished with 16th-century antiques and vast open fires, with gourmet meals served at a 15ft refectory table in the great hall. Black Tomato (020 7610 9008, blacktomato.co.uk) has two nights, £455pp full-board, including flights and car hire.

Le Couvent d'Hérépian was one of the classiest boutiques we visited last year, so we're looking forward to checking out its more ambitious sister development, Les Jardins de Saint Benoît, in the Languedoc (0871 218 7066, garrigaeresorts.com). From June, it will feature 171 traditional wooden-shuttered houses built in a 20-acre riverside estate around a

restoration, into this prehistoric movie set and Fred Flintstone gets spruced right up. When it opens in June, the 18-room Sassi di Matera will have centuries-old animal troughs doubling as bathroom sinks, and will forsake art in favour of the fossilised seashells embedded in the walls. Though every piece of the stone floor was painstakingly lifted to install underfloor heating, the builder was instructed to replace it as unevenly as before. Other lip-smacking Italian jobs include Rocco Forte's

Sicilian super-resort, Verda which opens in May; and, in June, the arrival in Tuscan Forte Village, probably the best family-holiday operator with the Castel Monastero. Exsus (020 7292 5050, exsus.com) has Sassi di Matera for £1,580 half-board, Verdura for £1,600 and Castel Monastero for £1,600.

DODECANESE TEASER

What would you say to a weekend half-board, in a brand-new five-star suite in the Med, with private terrace and plunge pool complimentary champagne



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